



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

**FAMILY ADJUSTMENTS AND PARENTAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG
MIXED MARRIAGE FAMILIES**

TAN JO-PEI

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**MASTER OF SCIENCE
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MIXED MARRIAGE FAMILIES**

By

TAN JO-PEI

**Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Master of
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**FAMILY ADJUSTMENTS AND PARENTAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG MIXED
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May 2001

Chairman: Associate Professor Rozumah Baharudin, Ph.D.

Faculty: Human Ecology

The primary purpose of the study was to determine the family adjustments and parental behaviour among mixed marriage families in Malaysia. The study also examined the association between selected factors of parental characteristics (age, sex, level of education, employment status and length of marriage), child personal characteristics (age and sex) and family contexts (number of children, family income, total household size and social support) with family adjustments (oneway self-oriented, oneway spouse-oriented and mixed) as well as parental behaviour (authoritarian, authoritative and permissive). In addition, the study investigated factors that uniquely contribute to various family adjustments and parental behaviour. Sample comprised 372 mixed marriage couples with children age 5 to 12 years who were chosen purposively for the study. Data were collected by interviews based on a standardized questionnaire. Family adjustments were assessed using the 'Family Adjustment Scale' by Rozumah and Rumaya (2000), while parental behaviour was measured based on a scale by Edwards (2000). Results showed that there was almost equal distribution (oneway self-oriented=38.9%, oneway spouse-oriented=28.9% and mixed=32.2%) of types of family adjustments adopt by the respondents, with slightly

more (38.9%) reporting oneway self-oriented adjustment in daily and customary activities. Majority (40.1%) of the mixed marriage parents also reported to have authoritative parental behaviour. Chi-square test of independence revealed that parent's age ($\chi^2=13.07$, $p\leq.05$), sex ($\chi^2=9.67$, $p\leq.01$), level of education ($\chi^2=8.55$, $p\leq.05$), employment status ($\chi^2=7.57$, $p\leq.05$) and length of marriage ($\chi^2=26.35$, $p\leq.001$) were significantly associated with family adjustments. On the other hand, education level ($\chi^2=9.37$, $p\leq.05$), employment status ($\chi^2=5.25$, $p\leq.05$) and total family income ($\chi^2=33.17$, $p\leq.001$) were also dependent on parental behaviour. In the bivariate analyses, it was noted that parents with female target child ($r=-0.18$, $p\leq.05$) and higher family income ($r=0.18$, $p\leq.05$) were more self-oriented in their family adjustment. Respondents who were more educated ($r=0.23$, $p\leq.05$), earned higher income ($r=0.35$, $p\leq.001$) and perceived more supportive social network ($r=0.28$, $p\leq.001$) were more likely to exhibit oneway spouse-oriented family adjustment. Respondents who reported mixed family adjustment tend to be working parents ($r=0.17$, $p\leq.05$) and perceived more supportive social network ($r=0.27$, $p\leq.01$). Results of the study denoted that authoritarian parents had bigger household size ($r=0.22$, $p\leq.05$). The study found noted that educated parents ($r=0.25$, $p\leq.01$) and those who have been married longer ($r=0.16$, $p\leq.05$) tend to express authoritarian parenting. While, permissive parents were less educated ($r=-0.28$, $p\leq.01$) and reported lower family income ($r=-0.29$, $p<.01$). Multiple regression analyses revealed that parents' age, childs' sex and family income were predictive of oneway self-oriented family adjustment among mixed marriage families. Oneway spouse-oriented family adjustment was found to be uniquely predicted by parents' age, childs' sex, family income and level of social support perceived by the mixed marriage families. Results from the study revealed that level of social support was the

only significant predictor of mixed family adjustment among the mixed marriage families. On the other hand, the study found that household size was the only significant predictor of authoritarian parental behaviour. Level of education and marital duration were found to be unique predictor of authoritative parental behaviour. On top of that, level of education, child's age, number of children and family income were found to uniquely contribute to permissive parental behaviour. The study concluded that family adjustments and parental behaviour of mixed marriage families were multiple determined by numerous factors within the ecology of the family. Findings have implications for understanding of dynamics in intercultural marriage and set stage for the development of effective family adjustments and mixed marriage parental educational programs in order to maximize the input from mixed marriage family.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Master Sains.

**PENYESUAIAN KELUARGA DAN TINGKAHLAKU KEIBUBAPAAN DI
KALANGAN KELUARGA BERKAHWIN CAMPUR**

Oleh

TAN JO-PEI

Mei 2001

Pengerusi: Profesor Madya Rozumah Baharudin, Ph.D.

Fakulti: Ekologi Manusia

Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk menentukan penyesuaian keluarga dan tingkahlaku keibubapaan di kalangan keluarga berkahwin campur di Malaysia. Kajian ini juga menentukan perkaitan antara ciri ibubapa (umur, jantina, taraf pendidikan, status pekerjaan dan tempoh perkahwinan), ciri peribadi anak (umur dan jantina) dan konteks keluarga (bilangan anak, jumlah pendapatan bulanan keluarga, saiz isirumah dan sokongan sosial) dengan penyesuaian keluarga (orientasi diri sehala, orientasi pasangan sehala dan campuran) dan tingkahlaku keibubapaan (autoritarian, autoritatif dan permisif). Di samping itu, kajian ini menentukan faktor yang berkaitan dan menyumbang secara unik kepada pelbagai penyesuaian keluarga dan tingkahlaku keibubapaan. Sampel kajian terdiri dari 372 pasangan berkahwin campur yang mempunyai anak antara umur 5-12 tahun. Responden telah dipilih menggunakan kaedah persampelan bertujuan. Data telah dikumpulkan melalui sesi temubual berpandukan borang soal selidik. Penyesuaian keluarga telah dinilai dengan menggunakan “Skala *Family Adjustments*” (Rozumah & Rumaya, 2000), manakala tingkahlaku keibubapaan diukur menggunakan skala oleh Edwards (2000). Hasil kajian menunjukkan pasangan berkahwin campur melaporkan peratusan yang hampir

sama (orientasi diri sehal=38.9%, orientasi pasangan sehal=28.9% dan campuran=32.2%) untuk ketiga-tiga jenis penyesuaian keluarga, namun terdapat lebih ramai (38.9%) pasangan berkahwin campur yang melaporkan penyesuaian sehal berorientasikan diri dalam aktiviti harian dan cara hidup mereka berbanding dua cara penyesuaian yang lain. Majoriti (40.1%) ibubapa berkahwin campur juga dilaporkan mempunyai tingkahlaku keibubapaan yang autoritatif. Ujian khi kuasa dua menunjukkan menunjukkan umur ibubapa ($\chi^2=13.07$, $p \leq .05$), jantina ($\chi^2=9.67$, $p \leq .01$), taraf pendidikan ($\chi^2=8.55$, $p \leq .05$), status pekerjaan ($\chi^2=7.57$, $p \leq .05$) dan tempoh perkahwinan ($\chi^2=26.35$, $p \leq .001$) berkait secara signifikan dengan penyesuaian keluarga. Manakala, taraf pendidikan ($\chi^2=9.37$, $p \leq .05$), status pekerjaan ($\chi^2=5.25$, $p \leq .05$) dan jumlah pendapatan keluarga ($\chi^2=33.17$, $p \leq .001$) menunjukkan perkaitan yang signifikan dengan tingkahlaku keibubapaan. Hasil analisis bivariat mendapati ibubapa yang mempunyai anak perempuan ($r=-0.18$, $p \leq .05$) dan jumlah pendapatan keluarga lebih tinggi ($r=0.18$, $p \leq .05$) adalah lebih berorientasikan diri dalam penyesuaian keluarga. Responden yang lebih berpendidikan ($r=0.23$, $p \leq .05$), mempunyai jumlah pendapatan keluarga yang lebih tinggi ($r=0.35$, $p \leq .001$) dan mempersepsikan jaringan sokongan sosial lebih kukuh ($r=0.28$, $p \leq .001$) cenderung ke arah penyesuaian keluarga sehal berorientasikan pasangan. Manakala pasangan yang melaporkan penyesuaian keluarga campuran cenderung untuk mempunyai pekerjaan ($r=0.17$, $p \leq .05$) dan mempersepsikan sokongan jaringan sosial lebih kukuh ($r=0.27$, $p \leq .01$). Hasil kajian mendapati ibubapa yang lebih autoritarian mempunyai saiz isirumah yang lebih besar ($r=0.22$, $p \leq .05$). Selain itu, ibubapa yang lebih berpendidikan ($r=0.25$, $p \leq .01$) dan mempunyai tempoh perkahwinan lebih lama ($r=0.16$, $p \leq .05$) mengamalkan tingkahlaku keibubapaan yang lebih autoritarian. Namun, ibubapa yang permisif pula didapati kurang berpendidikan ($r=-0.28$, $p \leq .01$)

dan berpendapatan lebih rendah ($r=-0.29$, $p<.01$). Secara umumnya, ia dapat dirumuskan bahawa penyesuaian keluarga dan tingkahlaku keibubapaan ditentukan oleh pelbagai faktor ekologi keluarga. Umur ibubapa, jantina anak dan jumlah pendapatan bulanan keluarga didapati menyumbang secara unik kepada penyesuaian keluarga berorientasikan diri sehalu. Penyesuaian keluarga berorientasikan pasangan sehalu pula didapati mempunyai perkaitan yang unik dengan umur ibubapa, jantina anak, jumlah pendapatan bulanan keluarga dan tahap sokongan sosial pasangan berkahwin campur. Hasil analisis menunjukkan tahap sokongan sosial merupakan satu-satunya peramal yang signifikan untuk penyesuaian keluarga secara campuran. Hasil analisis juga mendapati hanya saiz isirumah merupakan peramal unik untuk tingkahlaku keibubapaan autoritarian. Tahap pendidikan dan jangka masa perkahwinan pula didapati menyumbang secara unik kepada tingkahlaku keibubapaan yang autoritatif di kalangan pasangan kahwin campur. Hasil kajian juga menunjukkan tahap pendidikan, umur anak, bilangan anak dan jumlah pendapatan bulanan keluarga merupakan set peramal unik untuk tingkahlaku keibubapaan permisif. Hasil kajian didapati menyokong model keibubapaan Belsky. Dapatan kajian mempunyai implikasi terhadap pemahaman dinamik perkahwinan campur yang lebih mendalam dan, pembangunan program penyesuaian yang efektif dan pendidikan keibubapaan bagi memaksimumkan input daripada keluarga berkahwin campur.

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I certify that an Examination Committee met on 28th May 2001 to conduct the final examination of Tan Jo-Pei on her Master of Science thesis entitled "Family Adjustments and Parental Behaviour Among Mixed Marriage Families" in accordance with Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Act 1980 and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Higher Degree) Regulations 1981. The Committee recommends that the candidate be awarded the relevant degree. Members of the Examination Committee are as follows:

ABDULLAH AL-HADI HJ. MUHAMED, Ph.D.

Professor
Faculty of Human Ecology
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Chairman)

ROZUMAH BAHARUDIN, Ph.D.

Associate Professor
Faculty of Human Ecology
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

RUMAYA JUHARI, Ph.D.

Faculty of Human Ecology
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

ASNARULKHADI ABU SAMAH, Ph.D.

Faculty of Human Ecology
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)

ROJANAH KAHAR, MCL

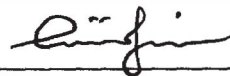
Faculty of Human Ecology
Universiti Putra Malaysia
(Member)



GHAZALI MOHAYIDIN, Ph.D.
Professor/Deputy Dean of Graduate School
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date: 12 JUN 2001

This thesis submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Science



AINI IDERIS, Ph.D.
Professor
Dean of Graduate School
Universiti Putra Malaysia

Date **14 JUN 2001**

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the thesis is based on my original work except for quotations and citations which have been duly acknowledged. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted for any other degree at UPM or other institutions.



TAN JO-PEI

Date

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As we head into the new millennium, marrying across cultural lines may not be something that is uncommon. For instance, the existence of *baba* and *nyonya* of Malacca and *mamak* of Penang is actually the product of mixed marriage. This may suggest that mixed marriage is not something rare as it had been happening since the Malacca empire period and colonization of Portuguese. Today, many social observers say that the pairing or union of man and women of different races has become more common and accepted by the others. These kinds of social trends are not only evident in large cities but also in the urban areas.

Marriage is by nature a multifaceted institution. Marriage can be defined as the emotional and legal commitment of two people to share emotional and physical intimacy, various tasks and economic resources (Olson & DeFrain, 1994). In a mixed marriage, sharing of emotional and physical intimacy as well as various family tasks are between two individuals of different cultural background. Thus, mixed marriage is different in terms of context, compared to a monocultural marriage.

Malaysia is a country with people of multiple races and cultures living on the same piece of land. The General Census Report (1995) shows that the Malaysian's population comprised 47.8% Malays, 10.1% *bumiputras*, 26.9% Chinese, 7.6% Indians and 3.2% other races. The variety of citizens in Malaysia has created a nation rich of culture, religion and custom. Over the years, mixed-race couples in the country have become common (Sanusi, 1978). This may suggest that the taboos against mixed marriage are easing.

Couple who married across cultural barrier is actually heading towards a challenging and motivating new life. They are building a new system for themselves, that is a family of their own. According to Olson and DeFrain (1994), family can be defined as *'two or more person who are committed to each other and who share intimacy, resources, decisions and values'* (page 9). It is noted that great emphases are given on emotional connections, commitment and the sharing of resources between individuals. For those who married beyond their own race or culture, they may have to overcome a lot of social and cultural difficulties in order to build a family which is able to adapt to changing social and cultural conditions. This is because both of them originated from two different sets of cultural background. They may have their own set of living style, communication and different types of social support system. When they enter into a new phase of married life, they may encounter difficulties that they would not have thought of before getting married. Couples may face many challenges together including difficulties in communicating, getting used to spouse's daily and cultural activities, the complexities of blending two family systems of different culture together

and dealing with in-laws, disagreement over money, questions regarding past friendships with the other sex, sexual relations, the questions of raising children as well as decisions about how to divide household tasks. Therefore, tolerance and patience are indeed needed for the success of the mixed marriage.

The occurrences of diversified cultural practices and values within a family may need some adjustment in order for the family to balance as well as to functioned (Tseng, 1977). Suitable and appropriate adjustments are indeed usable and needed to maintain and retain a newly built family. Couples who are mixed married need to be open-minded and appreciative of the uniqueness and diversity which had emerged within their family. According to Olson and DeFrain (1994), sharing feelings about one's cultural heritage with a person from another cultural or ethnic group can be a mutually rewarding experience, especially when the other party is going to be your partner for life. The couple need to be supportive of each other and share the cultural understandings between each other (Benson, 1981).

Becoming a parent is another phase of life that married couple had to go through. Most married couples who became parent, perceived parenting as an important goal and vital in their lives. Parenthood is the process of raising children who will provide continuity to the family. There is no greater responsibility or challenge compared to the task of nurturing your own offspring. However, one need to realize that the cultural diversity within a mixed marriage family created a set of unique yet varied beliefs and values about the up bringing of the future generation. This may lead to the thought that mixed

marriage creates problems for a family. However if one has a second thought it can also be the source of considerable learning and personal growth.

As mentioned earlier, people of different cultural background have their own standards of behaviour and the way in which belief, values and attitudes are transmitted to the younger generation. The couples need to be patient and considerate of each other's feelings in order to help and hinder themselves in their attempts to cope with the challenges of raising children within a mixed marriage family. Besides that, raising and socializing children is a team effort and the bond between partners can intensify as a couple raises children together (Olson & DeFrain, 1994).

Beside the common views of couples married beyond the cultural and racial barrier, children of mix parentage are also increasing numbers in nursery, kindergartens, schools or even on playgrounds near the neighbourhood. Children breed under the nurturance of mixed marriage parents may undergo different experience from children of monocultural parentage. Their upbringing may be different as they encounter influences of different culture and belief system in their daily lives (Jones, 1996). Futhermore, parents in mixed marriage families may have different views or perceptions on parenting practice (Mann & Waldron, 1977). Their parenting styles will be subsequently influenced by their cultural background and family adjustments, whether dominated by the father, mother or even a mixture of both.

Belsky's (1984) suggested that parental behaviour is generally influenced by parental personality and psychological well-being, contextual sources of stress and support as well as child characteristics. In other words, personal and psychological traits of the parent (e.g. age, level of education, self esteem, expectation and depression), child's characteristics (child's age, gender, temperament and health) and, sources of stress and support (e.g. social support network, marital relationship and employment status) had impact in shaping parental behaviour. Previous studies also found that parental traits are important factors to nurture a child's development (Vandewater & Lansford, 1998; Conger & Conger, 1997; Leadleater & Bishop, 1994 & Brody, Stoneman, Flort, McCrary, Hastings & Conyers, 1994). Besides that, parent's attitudes, approaches and perception about raising children tend to affect parental behaviour and as a result, influence children's developmental outcomes (Belsky, 1984). A review of literature revealed that different cultures and religious beliefs may bring upon distinctive attitudes towards processes within a family that include marriage, parenting, the family and divorces (Jones, 1996). This may reflect the interplay of divergent cultural norms for parenting in mixed marriage.

Conceivably, individuals in mixed marriage families need special strength and determinations to survive in their unique environment (Wehrly, 1996). Living in a diversified family, tend to regulate the married couples behaviour to each other, as parents to their children, as relative to their own parents, with parents of the spouse, as well as with others related to them (Maretzki, 1977). From the current literature, parents in different family contexts and culture more or less had dissimilarity within

their parenting behaviour (Maretzki, 1977). Very few studies have focused on how mixed marriage parents rear their child. Thus, the current study attempts to address the paucity of research in this area by exploring the approaches that parents of mixed marriage family used in child rearing.

It is noted that child rearing practices within mixed marriage family are receiving increase attention from the public as well as researchers. However, there seems to be limited local information or studies focusing on the parenting practices and child nurturance among mixed marriage families. Most of the research on the topic, however has been conducted using monocultural family with relatively little attention given to bicultural family. Besides that, previous studies tend to research on the comparison between two families of different cultural background. Past literature also emphasized on the product of mixed marriage, the children, while lacking the understanding on the core of mixed marriage that are the parents. There is limited contemporary local study on the family adjustments and parental behaviour of mixed marriage families since Sanusi's (1978) study. Therefore, this study purports to provide information on the current scenario of the family adjustments and parental behaviour of mixed marriage couples living in Malaysia while taking into account the demographical factors (parental characteristic, child personal characteristics and family contexts). In addition, the study aimed to determine factors that uniquely determined different family adjustments and parental behaviour among mixed marriage families.

Statement of the Problem

Data for the study were extracted from a larger study on mixed marriage families in Malaysia funded by the Department of National Unity Malaysia, Ministry of Community Development and National Unity in collaboration with the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia. The present study focuses on determining factors (parental characteristics, child characteristics and family contexts) related to family adjustments and parental behaviour among mixed marriage families residing in Malaysia. The study was designed to answer the following research questions. These questions were formulated to give specific focus to the research activities and ensure that the major goals of the study were met.

1. What patterns of family adjustments (oneway self-oriented, oneway spouse-oriented and mixed) do mixed marriage couples express within the family?
2. What patterns of parental behaviour (authoritarian, authoritative and permissive) do mixed marriage parents use in socializing their children?
3. What are the associations of parental characteristics (age, sex, level of education, employment status and length of marriage), child characteristics (age and sex), family contextual factors (number of children, total family monthly income, total household size and social support), family adjustments and parental behaviour among mixed marriage families?
3. What is the association between family adjustments and parental behaviour of mixed marriage families parents?
4. What are the factors that significantly related to different family adjustments and parental behaviour?
5. What are the factors that uniquely predict different family adjustments and parental behaviour of parents from mixed marriage families?

Significance of the Study

Although, it is noted that the phenomenon of parenting is well-documented, nevertheless, earlier studies have overlooked the emergence and importance of parenting scenarios among bicultural or mixed marriage family. Moreover, the few studies on parenting among mixed marriage families that can be considered empirical or verifiable lacked the ability to provide conclusive and sufficient information about family adjustments and parenting of mixed marriage parents. This is justification enough for further examination of the parental behaviour as well as the impact of family adjustments among mixed marriage families.

From an ecological perspective, this study is important for determining the ecological factors that are significantly related to family adjustments the made by the mixed marriage families. The study also aimed to investigate the various ecological factors that significantly associated with parental behaviour of mixed marriage couples. By examining the effect of parental background (age, sex, level of education, employment status and length of marriage) and child factors (age and sex) as well as factors related to family contexts such as family income, household size, number of children and social support system, the study may corroborate prior research related to family adjustments and parental behaviour of mixed marriage parents.

The study also serves to identify the current scenario of mixed marriage families in Malaysia. Given the sparse amount of research directly relating to cross-cultural issues